Albright

Mar. 3, 1944.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Born in the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario, August 15, 1881, of Pennsylvania Dutch and German extraction, although Canadian-bred for several generations, I early recoiled from the microcosmic viewpoint of that garden spot which regarded itself as about all that was worthwhile of Canada. Educated in the public schools with two years in High School, I used to read the Toronto Globe, which sent its editorial correspondents across Canada from ocean to ocean interpreting every part of Canada to the rest. In my grandfather's library was a book "The Polar and the Tropical Worlds", detailing exploration in all parts of the North. I used to read that on Sunday afternoons, poring over it intently. Chipewyan, Rae, and Resolution were familiar names. I remember reading of 60 below at Dunvegan, wondering how flesh and blood could stand it. I used to look at the map of Lesser Slave Lake perched away up in the northwest of Canada, wondering whether anything could grow there. In my early 'teens I ran across a letter of Sheridan Lawrence telling of his arrival at Fort Vermilion on the Lower Peace and of the lush growth and fine crops he found there. These things fired my imagination.

At an early age I took in the fact that if Canada were to amount to anything as a nation she would have to multiply her 3000-mile breadth by some depth worthwhile, otherwise a string of settlements along the international bound-

ary, speaking the same language as the nation to the south, would inevitably become tributary to it in business, thought, culture, and eventually would be absorbed politically. With the best of good will towards the neighboring republic, from which the most of my ancestors had come, I still wanted to feel that Canada had a future of her own. In order that she might have a cultural future she must broaden her physical basis, so it became an absorbing quest how far north Canada could be proven habitable and good.

Always I wanted to farm and many daydreams were indulged, planning such a future. I felt there were neglected opportunities in Old Ontario, but mostly my thoughts turned to the newer regions. I read all the immigration literature I could get hold of relating to Northern Ontario and the Prairie West. When 18 years of age I went to Manitoba on a harvest excursion and upon my return a neighbour of Scotch extraction (from whom better things might have been expected) remarked "So you have come back to Canada, have you?" She knew better, of course, but this chance question betrayed an habitual point of view which practically bounded Canada by Lake Erie on the south, the Niagara River on the east, Lake Ontario on the north and Hamilton on the west, with Toronto a sort of outlying suburb and Ottawa almost beyond the pale. The other provinces were a remote land with which the Niagara Peninsula had little in common. Buffalo was the metropolis and the chief avenue of escape for ambitious youth, as Boston was for the "Bluenoses".

Putting myself through the Ontario Agricultural College Associate (2-year) course I took a job in 1903 as herdsman on F.W. Hodson's dairy farm, 50 miles east of Toronto, and while there received an offer to go to Sussex, New Brunswick, as "Assistant Editor" of the Maritime Farmer. The initiative in this had come from others and wholly without my knowledge. I hesitated whether to accept, but Mr. Hodson, then Livestock Commissioner for Canada, clinched the matter by remarking "If you go down there at journalism for a couple of years it will be a couple more years of education, a couple more years of broadening out. If you go on the farm now, in spite of yourself, you will narrow." Reluctant as I was to accept that opinion, I could not escape the force of it.

I had written two or three articles for publication and did not know what a galley proof looked like. Yet here I was, a green lad from "Upper Canada" going down to edit a paper whose selling argument was that it was adapted to Maritime conditions! I was glad I had read all the Toronto Globe's articles on the Maritime Provinces! The absurdity of my situation could not escape me, but the Easterners treated me tolerantly and gave me every chance to make good. To this day I have a warm spot in my heart for every "Bluenose".

My first editorial job was to report the Halifax Exhibition, reviewing the livestock classes in detail. The judging was over when we arrived, but taking the previous year's report as a model I hobnobbed with the herdsmen and prepared a story that passed muster. I had to pick my way

as best I could, becoming Editor instead of Assistant Editor. At the end of a year and a half I received an offer from the publishers of "The Farmer's Advocate", at London, Ontario, to join that staff as Associate Editor. I was there eight years and a half, from February, 1905, to September, 1913. During the last two and a half years I lived on and managed Weldwood Farm, which I had persuaded the publishers to purchase and operate in the interest of the paper.

During these ten years at journalism I was looking forward to the day when I should be able to own a piece of land and puddle with the soil. In 1913 opportunity came. My father-in-law had preceded me to the Peace by four and a half years. We were in touch with the region in that way. In September I left editorial work and with wife and a baby girl a year and a half old headed for Beaverlodge in the Upper Peace River region. We travelled by rail to Edmonton and Athabasca Landing, by river freighter to Mirror Landing, opposite where Smith is now, by portage fourteen miles to Soto Landing, on the Little Slave River, thence by steamboat again up the Slave and across Lesser Slave Lake to Grouard. We arrived at Grouard in the mud after a rainy fall. We paid $100.00 for passage 85 miles to Peace River Crossing. From Grouard to Beaverlodge the trip of 250 miles was made by wagon and democrat. I walked more than half way. We landed at Beaverlodge on October 26, 1913.

I bought from my father-in-law, R.C. Lossing, one quarter section of the half section on which the Experimental Station is now situated, paying $12.50 an acre for raw land, and homestaeded in the vicinity.

I was full of questions which the local settlers could not answer. Marquis wheat was new. Was it adapted to the region, etc., etc.? Writing Dr. J.H. Grisdale, then Director of Experimental Farms, I offered to make a few simple tests if he would furnish the seed. He readily complied but explained that he could not pay anything for the work as they already had a man named S.J. Webb experimenting in Grande Prairie and sending some interesting reports. I gladly made the tests without compensation and in acknowledging the report Dr. Grisdale said Mr. Webb had left to enlist in the World War and he would like to pay me $200.00 to repeat my tests in 1915. I readily complied because I wanted more information, and the $200.00 would hire a teamster. The next year he made it$400.00 and in June, 1917, when I was thinking hard about following Mr. Webb's and my brother's example he wrote to say he thought there would be mucy immigration up here after the war and many questions would arise for which we should be ready with the answers. He proposed renting twenty acres and paying a part-time salary. I hesitated long for I had come West to get away from professional life and everything that belonged to it. I knew that if I took this up the tail would soon wag the dog, but friends all strongly urged acceptance. Eventually I accepted and from that time put

my shoulder to the wheel to expand the work. It was many years later that I came to realize I was better adapted to professional work than to commercial farming, having a strong tendency to buy dear and sell cheap.

We drove oxen for the first few years and when we finally killed and ate them we felt like cannibals. They were true friends.

For reasons that need not be detailed here we went through keen experiences financially but met them by living within our means even when it meant eating crude fare and dressing in very much-patched clothes. We made it a point to pay taxes and interest first, living on what was left and reducing indebtedness as we could. For two years I drove three oxen rather than go further in debt for a fourth. We looked Failure in the eye and met her challenge, prepared to sell out and lose everything if our creditors demanded it for we recognized that the money we owed we did not own. Our creditors owned it and it was up to us to put their interests first. From that day we began to build up and I'm prouder of the rags I wore then than of any clothes I've ever worn since.

From the beginning in the experimental work we featured horticulture and forage crops. It was evident enough that grain could be grown, but meadow crops were more problematical yet would be essential to the development of permanent agriculture. When alfalfa plots were sown neighbors scoffed. The subsoil was too hard, they said, and alfalfa would not grow without irrigation. We proved

that it would flourish if inoculated and would hold the land for years if only one cutting per annum were taken. The biggest problem was to kill it when the stands were ploughed. Plots seeded in 1823 averaged nearly a ton and a half per acre for 18 years.

In 1916 some nursery stock received from Ottawa was planted, including apple trees. A neighbour passed and asked what we were doing. Thinking to get a "rise" I replied "Planting apple trees." "Apple trees" he responded, "Apple trees! You've gone clean bugs". Those first apple trees never did bear, but others received from Morden bore apples and crabs. The first two little baskets of crabs were produced in 1929; the first two four-ounce apples in 1931--one for Adam and one for Eve. Adam of course ate the larger one. In 1942 a ton of apples and crabs were produced and in 1943 about three-quarters of a ton after a trying winter. Commercial apple culture will never amount to much in the Peace, but from a domestic standpoint a fruiting tree or even a blossoming tree means a great deal. Emphasis, however, is on the small fruits, including saskatoons. In 1918 the first saskatoon hedge was planted on the Station. It produced enormously and has attracted more favourable attention than anything else on the place. It has been well demonstrated that attractive homes may be established in the Peace. While the Beaverlodge Station has touched agriculture in many ways perhaps its greatest contribution has been to good citizenship and home making. In 1917 a hired man abruptly

put this question to the Superintendent, "What is your great ambition in life?" Then, answering himself he said "Oh yes, I know; you would like to breed a new early wheat of high yield and good milling quality." The Superintendent thought a moment then replied: "No, I would not mind doing that but its value to the farmer could be easily over-estimated. If it increased the profits of wheat growing the ultimate effect would be to shove up the price of wheat land. Society as a whole would benefit and landowners would profit but the producer as a worker would receive little more than before.

"No, there is something I would much rather do than that. I would rather show how good homes and good living conditions could be established in the Peace, for that is a benefit that would weave itself into the lives and characters of the people and that no economic process could filch away."

In 1919 when railroad construction was a controversial question I took a leading part in organizing a petition with twelve hundred signatures, asking the Government to take over, improve and extend the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia railroad. This was eventually done and a small railroad station was named after me because of the interest taken in railroad extension. For many years I took a fairly active part in public activities, among other things initiating the organization of the Associated Peace River Boards of Trade, of whose General Council I was the first chairman.

In 1930 I saw two oceans, the Pacific and the Arctic. In the spring I lectured at Vancouver and the lower mainland of British Columbia under the auspices of the "On to the Peace Association". In July I flew down the MacKenzie by instructions of Dr. E.S. Archibald, Director of Experimental Farms, to reconnoitre agriculture in that region, visiting the Substations there and making a report. The most popular lecture we have ever given is "To the Arctic by Air". Many an audience has jammed a hall or school house for from two to four hours, looking at the lantern slides and listening to the explanations. For years we did much lecturing in the Peace. I have gone for a week at a stretch speaking four to six hours a day in public addresses and retired on the average about 3 a.m. It was an enjoyable experience but a tax on health.

It has been a great satisfaction to watch the Peace River country grow from the pioneer stage to its present mature aspect and to see the Substation develop from half a dozen crude plots of grain sown with four oxen and a drill into a Station with from twelve to twenty employees and eighty acres of small plots. In the words of the late Theodore Roosevelt, I have always been able to say "I like my job". We have had many good helpers and been loyally supported at Ottawa.

CONDENSED BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES, W.D. ALBRIGHT

AS AT MAR. 3, 1944.

ALBRIGHT, WILLIAM DONALD, Supt. Dominion Exp. Station, Beaverlodge, Alta.

Ed. Maritime Farmer, Sussex, N.B., 1903-5; assoc. ed., Farmer's advocate, London, Ont., 1905-8, manag. ed. till 1913; manag. Weldwood Farm, 1911-3; pioneer in Peace River region, 1913-; manag. Exp. Substa., 1915-9; Supt., 1919-1941; supt. Dominion Exp. Station 1941-.--b. S. Cayuga, Ont., Aug. 15, 1881; s. Josiah D. and Sarah E (Moyer) A.; reared on farm; m. Eva Belle Lossing, May 22, 1908; c. Florence Eileen, Frederick Bruce, Robt. Gordon, Grad. 2-yr. course, Ont. Agr. Coll., 1903. Travelled hundreds of thousands of miles lecturing etc., within the Peace, flew 425 miles over it in 1929 and down the Mackenzie to Herschel Island in 1930. Fellow of the American Geographical Society of New York (dues suspended for the duration); fellow of the Canadian Geographical Society; fellow of the Canadian Society of Scientific Agriculturists; member of the committee for Canada of the International Geographical Union.

Notes: Daughter Florence Eileen now Mrs. W.A. Ross, of Kamloops, B.C. Sons: Frederick Bruce, Flt. Sgt. F.B. Albright, R.C.A.F., missing after Essen raid June 2, 1942. Robt. Gordon, A.C.1 Albright, R.G., is wireless electrical mechanic, R.C.A.F.